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Definitive Non-Testimonial Evidence for the Acquaintance of Polycarp and the Apostle John: A Critical Historiographical Audit

I. Introduction: The Epistemological Challenge of Definitive Non-Testimonial Proof

The historical claim that Polycarp, Bishop of Smyrna (c. 69–155 AD), personally knew and was instructed by John the Apostle, is fundamental to establishing the continuity of authority in early second-century Christianity. This assertion forms a critical link between the apostolic generation and the later defenders of emerging orthodoxy, such as Irenaeus of Lyon, Polycarp's student. ✓

A. Defining the Historiographical Constraint and the Burden of Proof

The core of this inquiry requires a strict audit of the evidence, demanding **definitive historical evidence** that is **not** reliant on 2nd or 3rd party testimony. This constraint immediately excludes the traditional, canonical sources for the Polycarp-John connection: the accounts of Irenaeus (writing in the 180s AD), Tertullian (early 200s AD), and Eusebius (early 300s AD). ✓

These excluded sources represent multi-layered hearsay and often

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